

# Cayrus, Juan Elías (1877–1923)

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## DANIEL OSCAR PLENC

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Juan Elías Cayrus was from a Waldensian family and came in contact with Adventism in Europe through Ellen G. White. He emigrated to Uruguay and formed a large Adventist family, whose descendants include pastors, denomination workers, and people committed to the church.

Juan Elías Cayrus (Giovanni Elia Caiirus, in Italy) was born on May 10, 1877. His parents, Juan Pedro Caiirus (Giovanni Pietro Cairus) and María Fontana, were Waldensians, based in Villar Pellice, province of Turin, in northern Italy. In 1886, when Juan was nine years old, he heard of Ellen G. White in the Piedmontese valleys of Italy. The parents disagreed with some of the ideas presented and stopped attending, but not Elias and his older brother David. They were especially interested in the presentation of the Sabbath as a rest day and the unconscious state of the dead until the day of resurrection.

Juan Elías Cayrus married Constanza Davit (1878–1975) on November 13, 1898.<sup>1</sup> They had 12 children and 58 grandchildren.<sup>2</sup> In 1900 Juan Elías Cayrus and his family emigrated to Uruguay (where his last name was changed from Caiirus to Cayrus). There he was the leader of the Waldensian church, teacher, Sunday School director, singing director, and preacher in the Waldensian colonies. He lived in the Waldensian communities, such as the Piedmontese, Waldensian, and Miguelete colonies (1909–1919). Finally he settled in Guichón, Paysandú department (1919–1923).

An Adventist missionary review *El Atalaya* [The Watchtower] left in a store in Colonia Valdense in 1914 served as a link for Juan Elías Cayrus and his family to come into definitive contact with Adventism.<sup>3</sup> An article about Saturday caught his attention and reminded him of some words he had heard in Italy from Ellen G. White's preaching. In 1916, after many days of reflection, prayer, and study of the Bible, he shared with his family his decision to keep the Sabbath. Leaving the Waldensian church was a long and painful process. Franklyn L. Perry and James T. Thompson from the Uruguay Mission wrote to Juan Elías and encouraged him. They also visited and organized a Sabbath School at his house in 1917.<sup>4</sup> The Cayrus family encouraged Ernst and Dreher to attend church meetings.<sup>5</sup> Germán F. Nohke and N. A. Hansen directed evangelistic meetings in Miguelete in 1917.<sup>6</sup>

On September 27, 1918, N. A. Hansen baptized Juan Elías Cayrus into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as well as his children Elena and Emilio, and his neighbors David M. Salomón, Clara Jourdan de Salomón and Margarita

Bertinat, in the San Salvador River.<sup>7</sup> By his testimony Cayrus brought several Waldensian people to Adventism.<sup>8</sup> In 1919 they settled in Guichón, Paysandú department, where he made many missionary contacts, and distributed copies of *El Atalaya* [The Watchtower] and tracts.<sup>9</sup> After his death his family and other Adventists founded the Adventist Church of Guichón.<sup>10</sup> Among his descendants are ten pastors and many others who have worked for the Adventist denomination.<sup>11</sup>

Juan Elías Cayrus died in Guichón, Uruguay, on July 14, 1923.<sup>12</sup> He left a legacy of search and defense of truth founded on biblical revelation, and missionary spirit.

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## NOTES

1. See: Robert G. Wearner, “*Elena G. de White y el pequeño Elías*”[Ellen G. White and Little Elijah], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review] 81, no. 2 (February 1981): 4–6; Daniel Oscar Plenc, *25 Historias de misioneros* [25 Stories of Missionaries] (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 2013), 45–50. The author has used information found in a manuscript by Alda Cayrus de Geisse entitled “Remembering.” Daniel Oscar Plenc, *Don Elías y las doce tribus* [Don Elijah and the Twelve Tribes] (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: by the author, 2010). For a record of Waldenses in the Río de la Plata region, see Carlo Pier Stefano Geymonat, *Familias valdenses en América del Sur* [Waldensian Families in South America] (Montevideo, Uruguay: Tradinco, 2008).
2. His children are: María Elena, married to David Plenc; Juan Emilio, married to Emilia Dreher; Pedro, married to Estela Dreher; Paulina Constanca, married to Julio Barboza; Pablo Enrique, married to Anita Stepaňuk; Adela Margarita, married to Silvio Garbarino; Alina Berta, married to Juan Cuchma; Lelia Anita, married to Arie Lavooy; Alda Esther, married to Günther Emilio Geisse; Benoní Ismael, married to Claudia Ernst; Esli Eber, married to Renée Da Graca; Inés, married to Héctor Luis Martigani. Elena was born in Italy; Emilio, Pedro, and Paulina were born in Piamontesa Colony; Enrique, Margarita and Alina were born in Waldensian Colony; Lelia, Alda, Benoní, and Esli were born in Miguelete; and Inés was born in Guichón.
3. Daniel Oscar Plenc, “*Elena de White y Sudamérica—I*” [Ellen White and South America—I], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 2006, 28; Daniel Oscar Plenc, “*Elena de White y Sudamérica—II*” [Ellen White and South America—II], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], February 2006, 26.
4. James T. Thompson, “*La obra en el Uruguay*” [The Work in Uruguay], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], October 1916, 14, 15.
5. José W. Westphal, “*La reunión anual de la Misión Uruguaya*” [Uruguay Mission Annual Meeting], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], February 14, 1918, 16.

6. Germán F. Nohke, “*Un esfuerzo público en Colonia Miguelete, Uruguay*” [A Public Effort in Colonia Miguelete, Uruguay], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 31, 1918, 9, 10.
7. N. A. Hansen, “*Noticias animadoras del Uruguay*” [Encouraging News From Uruguay], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], October 24, 1918, 9, 10.
8. José W. Westphal, “*La reunión anual de la Misión Uruguaya*” [Uruguay Mission Annual Meeting], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], June 1917, 8; Eduardo W. Thomann, “*La reunión anual de la Misión Uruguaya*” [Uruguay Mission Annual Meeting], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], April 11, 1918, 10.
9. August R. Sherman, “*Una gira entre los hermanos del Uruguay*” [A Tour Among the Uruguayan Brethren], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], November 29, 1919, 10.
10. Daniel Oscar Plenc, *Tributo a la esperanza: la Iglesia de Colonia Pintos Viana* [Tribute to Hope: the Church of Colonia Pintos Viana] (Rosario, Santa Fe: by the author, 2014); Daniel Oscar Plenc, “*Una iglesia de campo*” [A Country Church], *Theologika: Revista Bíblico-Teológica de la Facultad de Teología de la Universidad Peruana Unión* [Theologika: Biblical-Theological Review of the Faculty of Theology of the Peruvian Union University] 25, no. 2 (2010): 208–224.
11. They are: his son Benóní I. Cayrus; his grandchildren Rubén E. Cayrus, Eduardo Cayrus, and Juan M. Cayrus; his great-grandchildren Daniel Oscar Plenc, Osvaldo R. Cayrus, J. Horacio Cayrus; and his great-great-grandchildren Arturo E. Caballero, Daniel Sebastián Cayrus, and Christian Damián Cayrus. Also two politician grandchildren, Hernando Slekis and Humberto M. Rasi, and two politician great-grandchildren, Guillermo E. Biaggi and Héctor Gelhorn.
12. Pastor Carlos E. Krieghoff, from Uruguay Mission, wrote a brief obituary of Juan Elías Cayrus. Carlos E. Krieghoff, “*Necrologías*” [Obituaries], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review] (August 27, 1923): 15.

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